

Psalm 68

Linking this haftarah to **Exodus 34-35** is a description of the theophany on Mount Sinai in **verse 8** - "The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel."

...and **verse 17** - "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place."

Psalm 68:1 - "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him."

This was the cry as the Ark of the Covenant went before the people in the wilderness:

Numbers 10:34-35 - "The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp. Then it came about when the ark set out that Moses said, 'Rise up, O LORD! And let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You.'"

"Arise" - Christ's resurrection from the dead, as interpreted by many of the ancients.

"enemies" = Satan, and his principalities and powers; the professed enemies of Christ, personal and mystical; who, when he arose and exerted his mighty power in his conflict with them, in the garden and on the cross, were spoiled and dissipated, and obliged to fly before him: and who at the same time overcame the world, made an end of sin, abolished death, as well as destroyed him which had the power of it.

- *Gills Exposition*

"enemies" - We should also include the lying thoughts in our own minds that come against faith.

Psalm 68:2 - "As smoke is driven away, You will drive [them] away; as wax melts before fire, the wicked will perish from before God."

Rashi - From before the Ark in the days of Moses. (And it came to pass when the Ark traveled, that Moses said, "Arise, O Lord, and Your enemies will scatter." Shem Ephraim) And when it rested, he would say, "Return, O Lord, etc."

Psalm 68:3 - "But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yes, let them exceedingly rejoice."

The Hebrew expression is designed to express great joy; joy that is multiplied and prolonged.

Psalm 68:4 - "Sing to God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rides on the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him."

Heavens = *'ārābâh*, which usually means a desert area or plain.

The Septuagint renders it, "Make way for him who is riding westward."

"Who rides on the heavens" - See **Deuteronomy 33:26** - "There is none like the God of Jeshurun, Who rides the heavens to your help, And through the skies in His majesty." (See also verse 33)

i.e Riding at the head of his heavenly hosts on their march.

The Targum renders "Extol him that sitteth upon the throne of his glory in Arâbôth," which is explained by comparison of **Psalm 68:33** to mean the seventh or uppermost heaven. (See also Talmud Chagigah 12 b)

"his name is Yah" - a shortened poetic form of Yahweh, as in "Hallelujah." It occurs first in the Song of Moses (**Exodus 15:2**).

Psalm 68:5-6 - "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land."

Targum: "God is he that joins, couples single ones into a couple, as one, to build an house out of them"

[Prophetically, the church, bringing all into the family of God as brothers and sisters]

- **Isaiah 54:1** - "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD."

"bound with chains" - redemption in Christ

Isaiah 61:1 - "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners" (compare Jesus, **Luke 4:14-30**)

"in a dry land" - The Septuagint has "in graves."

Referring to those that murmured and rebelled against God, and vexed his Spirit in the wilderness, where their carcasses fell; and so dwelt in a dry land, and entered not into the rest.

- **Numbers 14:29** - "...your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me."

Psalm 68:7-8 - "O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah: The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel."

The Targum adds "In the pillar of cloud, and in the pillar of fire"

This is all an echo of the Song of Deborah (**Judges 5:4-5**) and possibly to similar poems which have not been preserved: "Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water; the mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel."

Psalm 68:9 - "You, O God, did send a plentiful rain, whereby you did confirm your inheritance, when it was weary."

confirm = *kuwn* - prepare, establish, make ready

Spiritually, the early and the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. Septuagint: "a free, spontaneous rain."

Or possibly referring to the Manna - "I will rain bread from heaven for you" (**Exodus 16:4**).

Targum: "thou hast let down the dews of quickening, and the rains of good pleasure;"

Psalm 68:10 - "Thy congregation hath dwelt therein: thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor."

congregation = *chay* - life, living creatures,

The corresponding Arabic word means a clan of one blood, "such a kindred group as was guided in war and on the march by one chief, migrating together, and forming generally a single settlement."

"the life of the flesh lies in the blood" (**Leviticus 17:11**)

Targum: "thou hast prepared an host of angels to do good to the poor of God."

Psalm 68:11 - "The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it."

Literally, "great was the company of the women that heralded it." The reference is to the female choirs which took a prominent part in the war songs of ancient days.

"*basar*," here rendered, "that published it," is in the feminine gender, and refers chiefly to the women, who with songs and music celebrated the victories of the Israelites over their enemies, according to the custom of those times (**Exodus 15:20; 1 Samuel 18:6**).

But the same word "*basar*" is used for announcing the gospel, so it could refer to the bride of Christ and her ministers:

- **Isaiah 40:9** - "O Zion, that bringest (*basar*) good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest (*basar*) good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!"

And *basar* can be inclusive of men:

Targum: "but Moses and Aaron evangelized the word of God to the great army of Israel."

Basar is derived from a root which signifies "flesh" - pointing to the incarnate Christ who was and is the Word of God.

Psalm 68:12 - "Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil."

After the conquest of the Midianites, God ordered the prey which was taken from them to be divided between them who went out on that expedition, and the rest of the people who continued in their tents, (**Numbers 31:27**)

Psalm 68:13-14 - "Though you have lien among the pots, yet shall you be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon."

A difficult passage to decipher.

Something like this: "Though you are at ease resting among the sheepfolds (or the hearthstones) at home, Israel - God's turtledove (see **Psalm 74:19**) - has wings that are now covered with silver, and her feathers with the sheen of gold." i.e. Peace and prosperity have come to Israel despite your lack of zeal. But for those who participated as the Almighty scattered kings, it was cold and snowing on Zalmon." In other words, there was adversity. Mount Zalmon (Mount Ebal) means "deep darkness, shadow hill, in the shadow of death."

The blessings and the cursings of the Law were read from Zalmon / Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

(**Joshua 8:30**; compare **Deuteronomy 27:11**). See Also **Judges 9:48**

It may also refer to those who wanted to stay in Babylon and not risk the effort and dangers of the return from exile.

Psalm 68:15-16 - "The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea,

the LORD will dwell in it for ever."

Hill of God = Mount Zion where the Temple was located

The "mountain of Bashan." i.e. Mount Hermon. It has three summits of nearly equal height, covered in snow. Probably the mount of Jesus' transfiguration.

Though Mount Zion but a low, mean hill, compared with Bashan/Mount Hermon, in outward appearance, yet it is exalted far above it, through its spiritual privileges, being the place where God's worship is established, where he is peculiarly present, and where he confers his choicest blessings. Bashan was an abundantly fruitful region, but Mount Zion yields spiritual fruit abundantly.

Psalm 68:17 - "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place."

The rabbis understood it to read, "God's chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai in holiness"

angels = *shin'an* - (only used in this passage) repetition, repeating

Targum: "the chariots of God are two myriads (or twenty thousand) of burning fires, two thousand of angels lead them"

Compare **Deuteronomy 33:2** - "And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them."

saints = holy ones - The Palestinian Targum has "ten thousand times ten thousand holy angels"

And **Acts 7:52-53** - "they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

It was taught that "there descended with God (on Mount Sinai) 22,000 chariots, each one like the chariot [*merkavah*] that Ezekiel saw" (Midrash Tanhuma Yitro 14) - This is the strange "wheel within a wheel" vision.

- **Ezekiel 1-3** was read at Pentecost because Ezekiel's theophany was related to Moses' at Mount Sinai.

Moses rose through the 'throne world' of God like any mystical voyager depicted in the Jewish Merkavah mysticism tracts. Passing the guarding angels of destruction, Moses is told that even the angels that serve the throne do not know God's place—for they say "Blessed is the Presence of the Lord, from His place" (Ezekiel 3:12); and he is also graced with a vision of the crowning of God, while the angels that serve the throne

repeat the word "Holy" three times (**Isaiah 6:3**). At the apex of his ascent, all the cosmic vaults are opened to Moses, and he sees the majesty of God.

- Pesikta Rabbati 20 (Piska Matan Torah)

With the opening of the heavens, all Israel sees the Glory face to face. As the words "I am the Lord" (**Exodus 20:1**) blast forth, the entire people (all 600,000) die in ecstasy. Revived by divine mercy, God sends forth 1,200,000 angels to enable the nation to receive the revelation and live. Each person is therewith supported by two divine beings, one to hold the head (so that he may withstand the vision), the other, the heart (so that it would not escape in awe). According to Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, however, these angels served a different purpose. One of them turned each Israelite about by the belt, to face God Himself, while the other crowned his ward with a heavenly crown. Thus aided, the nation of Israel received the Torah in ecstasy and vision.

- from 'Why Read Ezekiel on Shavuot?' | My Jewish Learning

<https://buff.ly/2ltqSH0>

Psalm 68:18 - "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them."

He captured the one who had captured us and held us in bondage.

- **Psalm 126:1** - "When the LORD brought back the captive ones of Zion, We were like those who dream."

Different ways to translate:

"for men" = in or of man, therefore captives or hostages.

Thus **Colossians 2:15** - "And having spoiled (disarmed) principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

or, Thou hast received gifts "in mankind," in humanity - which Christ did in his incarnation by becoming human.

In the Hebrew idiom, to take gifts for another is the same as to give them *to* another.

Rashi - You took gifts from the celestial beings to give them to the sons of men, also among a people who were rebellious and were rebelling against Him and provoking Him.

The Targum and Syriac version render it, "thou hast given gifts to men"

Targum: "You, prophet Moses, ascended to the firmament, you took captives captive, you learnt/taught the words of the Law and gave them as gifts to the children of men."

The pre-Christian Syriac Peshitta has, "You ascended on high, led captivity captive and gave gifts to the sons of men"

The gifts were prophets, apostles, evangelists, pastors, teachers, given to the church but also to all - "even the rebellious" who would be converted through their ministry.

- **Ephesians 4:7-12** - "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things). And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:"

See an extended discussion of Paul's wording here:
<https://buff.ly/2lwdKRm>

Psalm 68:19 - "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah."

Targum: "blessed be the Lord every day, he burdens us, adding precepts unto precepts;"

The word for "loadeth with benefits" is *`amac* - It has the meaning of either laying on a burden or bearing up a burden, depending on the context.

If the benefits are the gifts previously spoken about, then God's ministers continually add to our understanding of Christ's fulfillment of the Law and the resulting redemption. But at the same time, this knowledge lifts our burdens from us!

Psalm 68:20 (NET)- "Our God is a God who delivers; the LORD, the sovereign Lord, can rescue from death."

Psalm 68:21 - "But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses."

Targum: "but God shall break the head of his enemies"

This is the promise of the Deliverer from **Genesis 3:15** - "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

Rashi - "The hairy scalp" - The pate of Esau, who is a "hairy man," (**Genesis 25:25**) and who always goes with his guilt/tresspass.

- **Habakkuk 3:13** - "Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah."

- **Psalm 110:6** - "He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries."

Psalm 68:22 - "The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea: That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same."

There may be an allusion here to the victory achieved over Og, king of Bashan, in the time of Moses, in **Numbers 21:33-35**.

But also Messianic - **Psalm 22:12** - "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round."

The "kine/cattle of Bashan" became an expression for powerful oppressors (**Amos 4:1**). i.e. The fierce and cruel men that persecuted Christ and sought his life.

"and the tongue of thy dogs" -

Elisha's prophesy against Jezebel-

- **2 Kings 9:10** - "And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her."

"depths of the sea" - The Targum understands the promise to refer to the restoration of the righteous who have been eaten by wild beasts or drowned in the sea.

A Festive Celebration of Victory

Psalm 68:24-26 - "They have seen thy goings, O God; even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary. The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were the damsels playing with timbrels. Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel."

or better, "the Lord, who is the fountain of Israel"

Christ's blood is a cleansing fountain for Israel, and He is the overflowing fountain of living water and the Spirit.

"They have seen" - includes all humanity, who have watched the age-old conflict between God and His enemies.

Psalm 68:27 - "There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali."

Benjamin was Jacob's younger son and was one of the smallest tribes of Israel.

Targum Jonathan paraphrases: "The tribe of Benjamin crossed the (Red) sea at the head of all the other tribes." The Targum interprets the whole verse to be about Moses and Aaron singing at the Red sea, and of Miriam and the women playing with timbrels.

Septuagint: "there was Benjamin the younger in an ecstasy," or trance.

Some commentators see a prophetic reference to Paul (of Benjamin) and the other apostles from their tribes.

Psalm 68:28 - "Your God has commanded your strength: strengthen, O God, that which you have worked for us."

Septuagint: "Ordain, O God, thy strength... Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought in us"

- **Philippians 1:6** - "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:"

A warning to the church in Sardis:

- **Revelation 3:2** - "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God."

Psalm 68:29 - "Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee."

Targum: "out of thy temple thou shalt receive offerings; upon Jerusalem thy Shechinah dwells; out of their palaces kings shall bring unto thee sacrifices."

This looks toward the New Jerusalem

- **Zechariah 14:16** - "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles."

Psalm 68:30 - "Rebuke the company of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people, till every one submit himself with pieces of silver: scatter you the people that delight in war."

"company of spearmen" - strange phrase. Could be the "wild beast of the reeds" signifying the crocodile of Egypt or the behemoth, that lies under the covert of reeds (**Job 40:21**). Or "the people of the forest" as in the Jewish Bible, signifying the area of Bashan again.

"bull and calves" - the proud Gentile leaders and their people

"Even everyone that that submits himself for pieces of silver" - Those who submit to the success-driven way of the world/flesh, and prophetically the parasites and flatterers of the Man of Sin, who crouch before him, take his mark in their hands or foreheads, that they may be allowed to buy and sell.

Psalm 68:31-32 - "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord; Selah:"

The Targum is, "the sons of Ham shall come, the great men out of Egypt, to be made proselytes; the children of Cush (or Ethiopia) shall run to stretch out their hands in prayer to God."

Rashi - When You destroy Esau and the King Messiah arises, then they will bring you gifts from Egypt and from Cush.

Historically, Mark took the gospel to Egypt and it became an early center of Christianity. Also see the Ethiopian Eunuch (**Acts 8:27**)

See **Isaiah 19:18-19** - "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction. In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD near its border."

And **Isaiah 45:14** - "Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no (other) God."

Psalm 68:33 - "To him that rides on the heavens of heavens, which were of old; see, he does send out his voice, and that a mighty voice."

See again **verses 17-18** above for God's chariots

Christ -

- **Ephesians 4:10** - "He who descended is the very one who ascended above all the heavens, in order to fill all things."

The Targum interprets the "mighty voice" as the voice of the spirit of prophecy. It speaks the next verses.

Psalm 68:33-34 - "Ascribe ye strength unto God: his excellency is over Israel, and his strength is in the clouds. O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places: the God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God."

"In the clouds" - better "in the heavens," or skies. i.e. His strength is supreme.

"thy holy places" - Plural - God's eternal heavenly dwelling and his earthy dwelling, which was once the Tabernacle and later the Temple. Now it is His presence within the hearts of His people, a spiritual Temple of which we are living stones.

